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Viewing cable 06BEIRUT2582, LEBANON: TWO MEETINGS WITH SINIORA NARROW THE

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06BEIRUT2582	2006-08-10 05:37	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Beirut

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SUBJECT: LEBANON: TWO MEETINGS WITH SINIORA NARROW THE GAP, BUT HE BALKS AT LETTER TO UN AND REITERATES CALL FOR BETTER LANGUAGE ON SHEBAA

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman. Reason: Section 1.4 (b).

SUMMARY

1. (C/NF) PM Fouad Siniora clearly understands that time is short, and he specifically asked A/S Welch about a possible August 9 Israeli security cabinet decision to expand operations. Siniora realizes that the French-American discussions on a draft UNSC resolution are difficult, but he remains adamant about calling for IDF withdrawal simultaneously with the deployment of the LAF, as well as a clear promise by the international community to resolve Shebaa at some future time. Siniora also understands that if his Government sends a request to the Security Council asking for an international force ("UNIFIL plus"), it would greatly facilitate the adoption of the draft resolution and the resulting immediate cessation of hostilities. Not enthusiastic about the idea, Siniora is considering making this request to UN Secretary General Annan and asked A/S Welch for more time to discuss the issue with Nabih Berri later in the day. He opposed asking for Chapter VII authority and suggested that UNSC imposing Chapter VII would be problematic. Finally, Siniora asked whether a cessation of hostilities meant a lifting of the maritime and aviation "siege" of Lebanon. He was not pleased with the draft's call for verification procedures, suspicious that the Israelis would keep the port and airport shuttered indefinitely. End summary.

2. (C/NF) PM Siniora met with Assistant Secretary Welch and the Ambassador at the Grand Serail for more than an hour at midday on August 9. A second hour-long meeting was held late in the afternoon. The Prime Minister was accompanied by senior advisors Mohammad Chatta and Rola Nouraddine. Deputy Legal Advisor Jonathan Schwartz and Embassy poloff (notetaker) also attended the meetings.

3. (C/NF) Siniora's demeanor in the late afternoon session was more analytical and less emotional than in the day's earlier session. In the later session, there were no references to Lebanon's ability to withstand continuing "bombardment" if their conditions were not met. Siniora and his advisor, Mohammad Chatta, closely parsed the Assistant Secretary's suggestions and explanations, and at the end of

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the meeting wrote down the exact sequence of events that would ideally occur in the critical period between the cessation of hostilities and the deployment of the LAF, assisted by a considerably strengthened UNIFIL.

FIRST MEETING

4. (C/NF) Following a discussion of GOI concerns and certain aspects of both the promised LAF deployment to the south and the make-up of a multi-national stabilization force that could be at least initially an "enhanced UNIFIL," the Assistant Secretary relayed to PM Siniora an immediate message from the Secretary.

5. (C/NF) Siniora, when informed that the UNSC draft resolution under consideration was in serious jeopardy because of French-American differences and that events on the ground could soon become even more problematic, paused and reassessed the situation. As in his previous two meetings with the Assistant Secretary, Siniora said he absolutely required two items in the resolution: IDF withdrawal at the time of cease-fire, and some treatment of Shebaa that could be presented to the Lebanese people as equitable and just. A/S Welch explained that the timing of the Israeli withdrawal would most likely depend on two critical factors: the effectiveness of LAF deployment to the south, and the date by

which sufficient numbers of an international force (which at least initially could be "UNIFIL-plus") were deployed on the ground.

¶16. (C/NF) Siniora clearly understood A/S Welch's proposal that to get the draft resolution through the Security Council as quickly as possible, his Government should consider requesting the UN Security Council for a heavily augmented and strengthened UNIFIL. This, A/S Welch explained, would allow force planning to begin immediately, which would hasten the arrival of international troops and thus speed the

BEIRUT 00002582 002 OF 003

Israeli withdrawal. Siniora and his two advisors went over some suggested wording, but would not commit themselves to any specific language. Their greatest concern was the timing of the IDF's withdrawal from recently occupied Lebanese territory.

¶17. (C/NF) PM Siniora stated that he feared that the members of the Security Council do not yet understand his political constraints -- nor the full benefit that adoption of his Cabinet-approved seven points would bring.

¶18. (C/NF) Siniora urged the U.S. and the UN Security Council not to allow Iran and Syria to sabotage this peace effort. He said the Iranian Foreign Minister, in a recent visit to Beirut, had done all he could to undermine the peace effort, and Siniora was convinced that Iranian pressure continues and is relentless.

¶19. (C/NF) As the meeting concluded, PM Siniora urged A/S Welch, in his meeting with Berri, to ensure that the Speaker clearly understood that withdrawal of IDF is linked to the deployment of a multi-national force, which at this stage, Siniora understands as "UNIFIL plus."

¶10. (C/NF) PM Siniora also emphasized that Berri has to understand that if the Government of Lebanon deploys the LAF with "UNIFIL plus," and Shebaa is mentioned, Hizballah has to disarm south of the Litani.

SECOND MEETING

¶11. (C/NF) PM Siniora seemed reassured that A/S Welch's meeting with Nabih Berri had gone fairly well, and particularly in Berri's professed understanding that Hizballah would have to disarm in the south. But he also cautioned that Berri was difficult to pin down and employs ambiguous language to great effect.

¶12. (C/NF) Siniora accepted A/S Welch's proposition that the first UN resolution should include almost all the issues that underlay the conflict: disarmament of Hizballah, an effective arms embargo to non-state players, a sequenced withdrawal of both Hizballah and IDF from south Lebanon, respect for the Blue Line, deployment of the LAF to south Lebanon, and finally, the insertion of an international force to assist the LAF -- now centered on a greatly enhanced UNIFIL.

¶13. (C/NF) Siniora and his advisor, Mohammad Chatta, carefully noted the sequence of events, particularly in the fragile gap period between the cessation of hostilities and joint deployment of the LAF and UNIFIL plus. He expressed approval that the draft resolution stated that, at least initially, disarmament of Hizballah would take place only in the south.

SHEBAA ... AGAIN

¶14. (C/NF) As he has in every previous meeting, PM Siniora emphasized the importance dealing with Shebaa, and voiced his concern the draft still did not recognize this central issue. He indicated that the draft's current references to Shebaa,

in the context of border delineation, were not satisfactory.

¶15. (C/NF) Siniora listened with care to the argument that the draft's references to Shebaa gave the UN Secretary General considerable leeway in addressing the issue, but he gave no indication that he was ready to concede the point.

A LETTER TO THE UN

¶16. (C/NF) PM Siniora said he would carefully consider the Assistant Secretary's advice that the Government of Lebanon, using the language of last week's Cabinet statement, send a letter to UN SYG Annan that requested a "UNIFIL-plus"-type international force for post-conflict stabilization. Siniora indicated he was very hesitant to send such a document, because he feared it may negatively affect Lebanon's future interests. He said he would have a more definitive answer following discussions with Nabih Berri that evening.

BEIRUT 00002582 003.2 OF 003

¶17. (C/NF) Demonstrating little enthusiasm for sending a letter, Siniora said that, in any case, he could not ask for Chapter VII authority. A/S Welch said that Siniora should be prepared to accept Chapter VII if, as Ambassador Welch expected, the UNSC included it. Siniora (who in earlier meetings had indicated that he could never ask for Chapter VII but would not oppose it if imposed upon Lebanon) said that he believed that Chapter VII would be problematic for him even if he did not request it. He explained that his letter to the UNSC, by being silent on the Chapter VII question, would be seen as a set-up for Chapter VII. (Note: The Ambassador will explore Chapter VII with Siniora, French Ambassador Emie, and others on 8/10. End note.)

LIFTING THE SIEGE

¶18. (C/NF) As the meeting concluded, Siniora asked whether the current "state of siege" would be lifted upon cessation of hostilities. When informed that the draft resolution addressed this issue, but it involved a verification process, the Prime Minister expressed dissatisfaction. PM Siniora maintained that a sovereign nation should not be placed under anyone's inspection regime.

¶19. (U) A/S Welch did not have the opportunity to clear this cable but has authorized its release.

FELTMAN